IBHE Data Points

# IBHE FIRST LOOK – FALL ENROLLMENT 2026-27

Illinois Public Universities
Preliminary Report: October 2026

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Overall Enrollment:** Total enrollment increased by 0.15% (+287 students) to 190,114, the highest of the nine fall terms shown in this report (Fall 2018 to Fall 2026). This growth was driven by undergraduates, as graduate/professional enrollment decreased by 3.9%.
- **Undergraduate Increase:** The undergraduate population increased by 1.8% (+2,464 students) to 136,795, the fourth consecutive annual increase and the highest of the nine fall terms shown (Fall 2018 to Fall 2026). This growth included a 2.2% increase in first-time, full-time freshmen (to 27,502, the highest of the five fall terms in Table 1 and 20.7% above Fall 2018), a 0.8% increase in new full-time transfers, and a 2.0% increase in continuing undergraduates.
- **Growth Across Universities:** Seven of the 12 universities increased undergraduate enrollment, led by CSU (+15.8%), SIUE (+10.1%), and UIC (+5.6%).
- **Gains for Underrepresented Students:** Enrollment for African American and Latino students increased. Total African American enrollment grew by 7.0% (+1,608 students), and total Latino enrollment grew by 3.5% (+1,156 students).
- **Drop in International Students:** Graduate/professional international enrollment decreased by 19.9% (-2,626 students), and undergraduate international enrollment decreased by 5.8% (-521 students). Overall, international student enrollment fell 14.2%.
- **Retention Rate:** The overall fall-to-fall freshman retention rate was 82.6%, down slightly from 83.6% the prior year. Retention was 67.0% for African American freshmen (67.3% the prior year) and 79.5% for Latino freshmen (80.6%). Over the four years from 2022 to 2026, retention has risen 5.0 percentage points for African American freshmen and 3.8 percentage points for Latino freshmen, compared with 2.3 percentage points overall.
- **Distance Education:** Enrollment in exclusively online courses reached 32,901 students in Fall 2026, a 19.3% increase from 27,571 in Fall 2023, the first year for which distance education data were collected.
- **Gender:** Female students accounted for 54.2% of total enrollment in Fall 2026 (103,111 of 190,114 students). Year-over-year, enrollment rose 0.9% for female students and decreased 1.0% for male students.

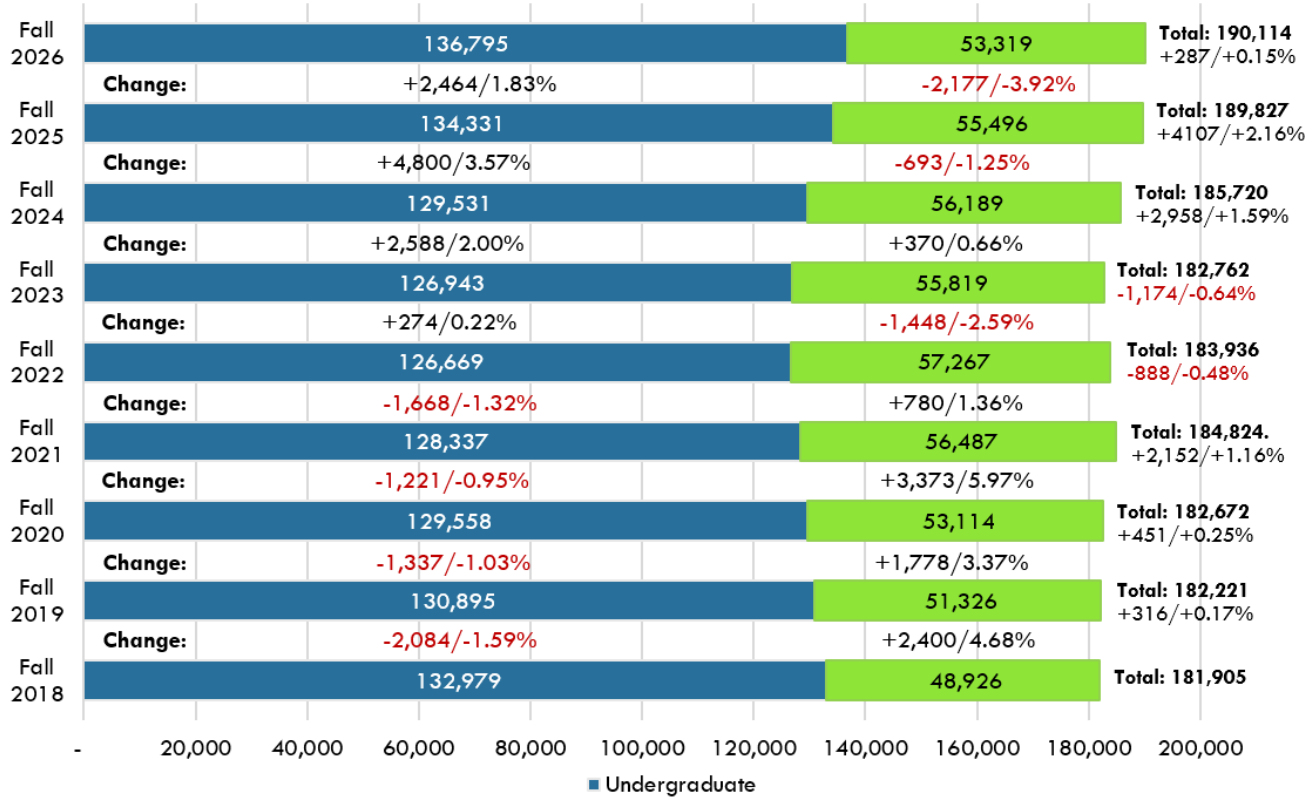
## Overview

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) collaborates with Illinois public universities to provide an early look at fall enrollment. Aligned with IBHE's strong focus on equity as described in the 2021 strategic plan for higher education, A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth, this report provides enrollment and retention data by race and ethnicity, alongside detailed breakouts for dual credit, new undergraduate transfers, and distance education. All Fall 2026 figures are preliminary counts collected shortly after each institution's 10-day census through the IBHE First Look survey, whereas prior-year figures reflect official fall enrollment data submitted through the Illinois Higher Education Information System (IHEIS).

Total headcount enrollment at Illinois public universities rose 0.15% (+287 students) to 190,114 in Fall 2026, the highest of the nine fall terms shown (Figure 1). From Fall 2018 to Fall 2026, total enrollment increased 4.5% (+8,209 students), undergraduate enrollment increased 2.9% (+3,816), and graduate and professional enrollment increased 9.0% (+4,393). Undergraduate enrollment grew for the fourth

consecutive year, by 2,464 students (+1.8%), after decreasing each year from Fall 2019 to Fall 2022, while graduate and professional enrollment fell by 2,177 students (-3.9%), mainly because of a 19.9% drop in international graduate students (-2,626).

*Figure 1. Illinois Public University Headcount Enrollments by Program Level*




**Undergraduate Enrollment.** As shown in Table 1, undergraduate enrollment rose 1.8% (+2,464 students) to 136,795 in Fall 2026. Continuing undergraduates, the largest group, grew 2.0% (+1,830). New first-time, full-time freshmen rose 2.2% (+592), and new full-time transfers rose 0.8% (+80). New part-time undergraduates rose 2.2% (+48), while dual credit/dual enrollment fell 2.2% (-86).

*Table 1. Undergraduate Enrollment Type for Illinois Public Universities (Headcount)*

| Undergraduate Type | Fall 2026 | Fall 2025 | Fall 2024 | Fall 2023 | Fall 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dual Credit / Dual Enrollment | 3,767 | 3,853 | 3,206 | 2,919 | 2,641 |
| New First-Time, Full-Time (Freshmen) | 27,502 | 26,910 | 25,285 | 25,094 | 24,734 |
| New Full-Time Transfers | 10,621 | 10,541 | 10,042 | 9,410 | 9,481 |
| New Part-Time (first-time + transfer) | 2,221 | 2,173 | 2,196 | 2,523 | 2,165 |
| Continuing / Other | 92,684 | 90,854 | 88,802 | 86,997 | 87,648 |
| **Total** | **136,795** | **134,331** | **129,531** | **126,943** | **126,669** |

**Graduate and Professional Enrollment.** As shown in Figure 1, graduate and professional enrollment at Illinois public universities decreased by 3.9% (-2,177 students) to 53,319, following a 1.2% decrease in 2025-26.

## Institutional Highlights and Detailed Enrollment

**Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment.** In Fall 2026, ten of the 12 public universities reported dual credit/dual enrollment students. As shown in Table 2, dual credit enrollment fell 2.2% (-86 students) to 3,767. Eastern Illinois University (EIU) accounted for most of the decrease (-182, from 2,673 to 2,491), with declines also at Western Illinois University (WIU; 120 to 78), the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS; 37 to 1), Chicago State University (CSU; 148 to 124), Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU; 156 to 147), Illinois State University (ISU; 11 to 7), and the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC; 39 to 36). Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE; +170, from 607 to 777) and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC; +44, from 61 to 105) partly offset these declines. EIU still enrolls nearly two-thirds (66.1%, or 2,491 of 3,767) of all dual credit students at Illinois public universities.

*Table 2. Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment at Illinois Public Universities (Headcount)*

| | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | 2025-26 | *2026-27 | 1-Yr Change | 1-Yr % Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSU | 2 | 80 | 84 | 148 | 124 | -24 | -16.2% |
| EIU | 2,325 | 2,447 | 2,595 | 2,673 | 2,491 | -182 | -6.8% |
| GSU | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0.0% |
| ISU | 11 | 7 | 17 | 11 | 7 | -4 | -36.4% |
| NEIU | 98 | 105 | 169 | 156 | 147 | -9 | -5.8% |
| NIU | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | NA* |
| SIUC | 5 | 7 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | NA* |
| SIUE | 0 | 95 | 129 | 607 | 777 | 170 | 28.0% |
| UIC | 16 | 41 | 50 | 39 | 36 | -3 | -7.7% |
| UIS | 0 | 0 | 0 | 37 | 1 | -36 | -97.3% |
| UIUC | 71 | 51 | 43 | 61 | 105 | 44 | 72.1% |
| WIU | 113 | 86 | 115 | 120 | 78 | -42 | -35.0% |
| **Total** | **2,641** | **2,919** | **3,206** | **3,853** | **3,767** | **-86** | **-2.2%** |

**Percentage change cannot be calculated from a starting value of zero.*

**First-Time, Full-Time Undergraduates.** First-time, full-time freshmen reached 27,502 in Fall 2026 (+2.2%, or +592 students), the highest of the five fall terms in Table 1. Seven of the 12 universities enrolled larger freshman classes than in Fall 2025 (Table 3). The largest gains in headcount were at SIUE (+571), Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC; +238), UIUC (+128, to 9,326), and CSU (+107); the largest percentage gains were at CSU (+40.2%), Governors State University (GSU; +38.3%), and SIUE (+33.3%). UIC enrolled 5,347 freshmen (+0.3%). Of the five universities with smaller freshman classes, ISU (-361, to 3,883) and Northern Illinois University (NIU; -120, to 2,290) had the largest declines. Over the eight years from Fall 2018 to Fall 2026 (Table 3), freshman enrollment increased 20.7% (+4,724 students). Of the 12 universities, 11 enrolled more freshmen than in Fall 2018, led by CSU (+160.8%) and SIUC (+56.4%); WIU had the only decrease (-53.5%).

*Table 3. First-Time Full-Time Undergraduates (Freshmen) at Illinois Public Universities (Headcount)*

| | 2018-19 | 2025-26 | 2026-27 | 1-Yr % Change | 8-Yr % Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSU | 143 | 266 | 373 | 40.2% | 160.8% |
| EIU | 690 | 787 | 752 | -4.4% | 9.0% |
| GSU | 201 | 167 | 231 | 38.3% | 14.9% |
| ISU | 3673 | 4,244 | 3,883 | -8.5% | 5.7% |
| NEIU | 425 | 524 | 497 | -5.2% | 16.9% |
| NIU | 1831 | 2,410 | 2,290 | -5.0% | 25.1% |
| SIUC | 1113 | 1,503 | 1,741 | 15.8% | 56.4% |
| SIUE | 1654 | 1,715 | 2,286 | 33.3% | 38.2% |
| UIC | 4212 | 5,331 | 5,347 | 0.3% | 26.9% |
| UIS | 313 | 309 | 347 | 12.3% | 10.9% |
| UIUC | 7600 | 9,198 | 9,326 | 1.4% | 22.7% |
| WIU | 923 | 456 | 429 | -5.9% | -53.5% |
| **Total** | **22,778** | **26,910** | **27,502** | **2.2%** | **20.7%** |

**New Full-Time Transfer Students.** New full-time transfer enrollment rose 0.8% (+80 students) to 10,621 (Table 4). Five of the 12 universities enrolled more new transfers than in Fall 2025: CSU (+45.7%, +95), SIUE (+19.2%, +158), ISU (+7.0%, +109), UIC (+6.9%, +145), and SIUC (+6.6%, +60). The largest declines were at NIU (-14.6%, -195), EIU (-13.0%, -52), and UIUC (-10.3%, -164). Over the eight years from Fall 2018 to Fall 2026, new full-time transfer enrollment decreased 1.5% (-159 students). Six universities enrolled more new transfers than in Fall 2018, led by CSU (+22.7%) and UIC (+22.3%), while the largest decreases were at WIU (-46.7%) and EIU (-30.1%).

*Table 4. New Full-Time Transfer Students at Illinois Public Universities (Headcount)*

| | 2018-19 | 2025-26 | 2026-27 | 1-Yr % Change | 8-Yr % Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSU | 247 | 208 | 303 | 45.7% | 22.7% |
| EIU | 499 | 401 | 349 | -13.0% | -30.1% |
| GSU | 447 | 416 | 377 | -9.4% | -15.7% |
| ISU | 1,648 | 1,547 | 1,656 | 7.0% | 0.5% |
| NEIU | 637 | 510 | 506 | -0.8% | -20.6% |
| NIU | 1,373 | 1,333 | 1,138 | -14.6% | -17.1% |
| SIUC | 1,056 | 908 | 968 | 6.6% | -8.3% |
| SIUE | 868 | 825 | 983 | 19.2% | 13.2% |
| UIC | 1,839 | 2,104 | 2,249 | 6.9% | 22.3% |
| UIS | 289 | 322 | 320 | -0.6% | 10.7% |
| UIUC | 1,232 | 1,592 | 1,428 | -10.3% | 15.9% |
| WIU | 645 | 375 | 344 | -8.3% | -46.7% |
| **Total** | **10,780** | **10,541** | **10,621** | **0.8%** | **-1.5%** |

**New Part-Time Undergraduate Students.** In 2026-27, new part-time undergraduate enrollment, which combines first-time and transfer students who enrolled part time, increased by 2.2% (+48 students) to 2,221. Growth was led by SIUE (+103, or +48.4%), SIUC (+38, or +17.4%), and UIC (+32, or +7.6%), while the largest declines occurred at UIUC (-61, or -61.6%) and NIU (-39, or -12.4%). Because this group is small, small changes in headcount produce large percentage changes.

**Continuing Undergraduate Students.** Continuing undergraduate enrollment grew 2.0% (+1,830 students) to 92,684 in Fall 2026 (Table 5). Nine universities increased their continuing undergraduate enrollment and NEIU was unchanged. The largest gains were at UIC (+1,170, +7.1%), UIUC (+874, +3.2%), NIU (+289, +3.6%), and CSU (+109, +10.5%). Only WIU (-540, -19.1%) and ISU (-145, -1.1%) declined. Over the eight years from Fall 2018 to Fall 2026, continuing undergraduate enrollment decreased 8.2% (-8,303 students). Four universities grew over this period, GSU (+11.2%), ISU (+8.1%), UIS (+5.3%), and NEIU (+2.8%), while the largest decreases were at WIU (-53.2%) and CSU (-33.1%).

*Table 5. Continuing Undergraduate Students at Illinois Public Universities (Headcount)*

| | 2018-19 | 2025-26 | 2026-27 | 1-Yr % Change | 8-Yr % Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CSU | 1,708 | 1,034 | 1,143 | 10.5% | -33.1% |
| EIU | 3,227 | 2,784 | 2,789 | 0.2% | -13.6% |
| GSU | 1,702 | 1,887 | 1,892 | 0.3% | 11.2% |
| ISU | 12,392 | 13,535 | 13,390 | -1.1% | 8.1% |
| NEIU | 2,746 | 2,822 | 2,822 | 0.0% | 2.8% |
| NIU | 9,296 | 8,061 | 8,350 | 3.6% | -10.2% |
| SIUC | 7,299 | 5,786 | 5,838 | 0.9% | -20.0% |
| SIUE | 7,153 | 6,565 | 6,570 | 0.1% | -8.2% |
| UIC | 18,296 | 16,366 | 17,536 | 7.1% | -4.2% |
| UIS | 1,495 | 1,568 | 1,574 | 0.4% | 5.3% |
| UIUC | 30,791 | 27,622 | 28,496 | 3.2% | -7.5% |
| WIU | 4,882 | 2,824 | 2,284 | -19.1% | -53.2% |
| **Total** | **100,987** | **90,854** | **92,684** | **2%** | **-8.2%** |

**Graduate and Undergraduate Enrollment Summary.** As shown in Table 6, total enrollment increased by 0.15%, with a 1.8% increase in undergraduate enrollment and a 3.9% decrease in graduate/professional enrollment. Seven of the 12 Illinois public universities increased undergraduate enrollment: CSU (15.8%), SIUE (10.1%), UIC (5.6%), SIUC (4.6%), UIUC (2.1%), UIS (0.9%), and GSU (0.9%).

The largest undergraduate enrollment decreases were at WIU (-17.4%) and EIU (-4.0%). Decreases at the other universities ranged from 0.5% to 2.0%.

At the graduate and professional level, statewide enrollment declined by 3.9% (-2,177 students), and enrollment decreased at all 12 public universities. Percentage declines were largest at UIS (-18.6%), WIU (-14.9%), and EIU (-13.8%), and smallest at UIC (-0.3%). In headcount, UIUC had the largest decrease, 609 graduate students (-2.7%).

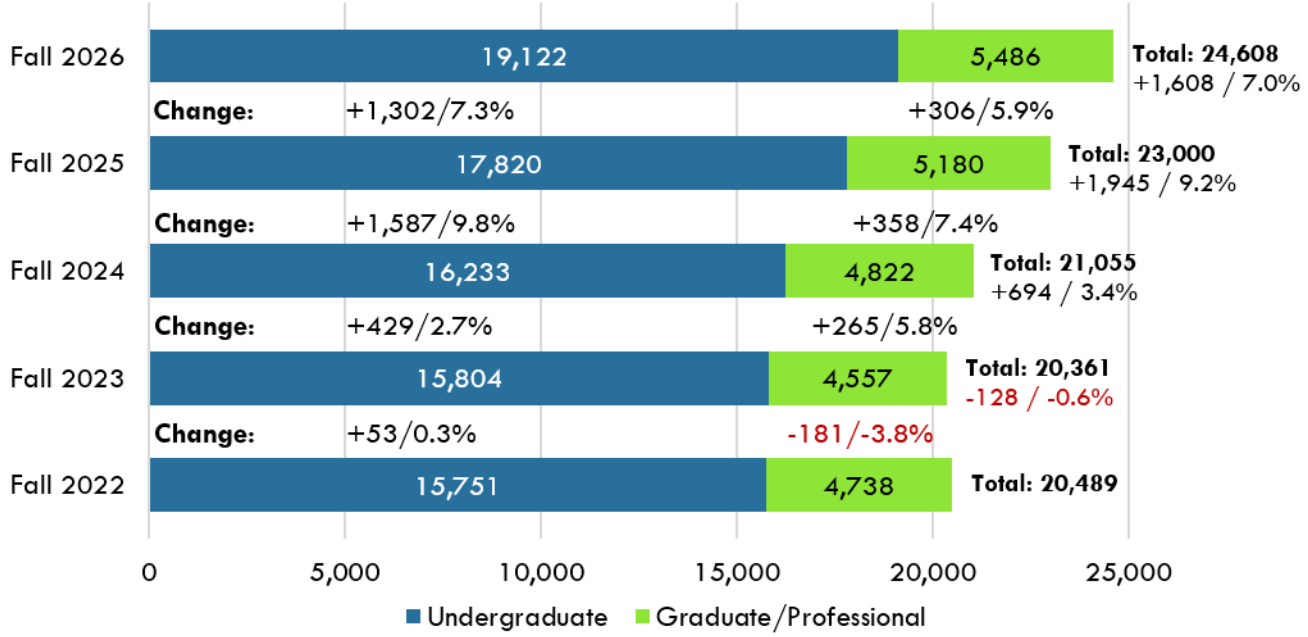
*Table 6. Enrollments and Year to Year Change (Headcount)*

| | Fall 2025-2026 | | | Fall 2026-2027 | | | Year-to-Year % Change | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Undergrad | Graduate | Total | Undergrad | Graduate | Total | Undergrad | Graduate | Total |
| CSU | 1,747 | 758 | **2,505** | 2,023 | 747 | **2,770** | 15.8% | -1.5% | **10.6%** |
| EIU | 6,732 | 1,375 | **8,107** | 6,466 | 1,185 | **7,651** | -4.0% | -13.8% | **-5.6%** |
| GSU | 2,589 | 1,760 | **4,349** | 2,612 | 1,576 | **4,188** | 0.9% | -10.5% | **-3.7%** |
| ISU | 19,513 | 2,481 | **21,994** | 19,128 | 2,449 | **21,577** | -2.0% | -1.3% | **-1.9%** |
| NEIU | 4,246 | 1,532 | **5,778** | 4,202 | 1,472 | **5,674** | -1.0% | -3.9% | **-1.8%** |
| NIU | 12,118 | 3,960 | **16,078** | 12,053 | 3,758 | **15,811** | -0.5% | -5.1% | **-1.7%** |
| SIUC | 8,416 | 3,369 | **11,785** | 8,804 | 3,262 | **12,066** | 4.6% | -3.2% | **2.4%** |
| SIUE | 9,925 | 2,888 | **12,813** | 10,932 | 2,731 | **13,663** | 10.1% | -5.4% | **6.6%** |
| UIC | 24,260 | 11,609 | **35,869** | 25,620 | 11,579 | **37,199** | 5.6% | -0.3% | **3.7%** |
| UIS | 2,337 | 2,027 | **4,364** | 2,359 | 1,649 | **4,008** | 0.9% | -18.6% | **-8.2%** |
| UIUC | 38,572 | 22,276 | **60,848** | 39,393 | 21,667 | **61,060** | 2.1% | -2.7% | **0.3%** |
| WIU | 3,876 | 1,461 | **5,337** | 3,203 | 1,244 | **4,447** | -17.4% | -14.9% | **-16.7%** |
| **Total** | **134,331** | **55,496** | **189,827** | **136,795** | **53,319** | **190,114** | **1.8%** | **-3.9%** | **0.2%** |

## Enrollment Patterns by Race/Ethnicity

**Enrollment of African American Students.** African American enrollment rose 7.0% (+1,608 students) to 24,608 in Fall 2026, the highest of the five fall terms shown (Figure 2). Undergraduate enrollment grew 7.3% (+1,302) to 19,122, and graduate and professional enrollment grew 5.9% (+306) to 5,486, continuing the increase from the prior year.

*Figure 2. Headcount Enrollment of African American Students at Illinois Public Universities*



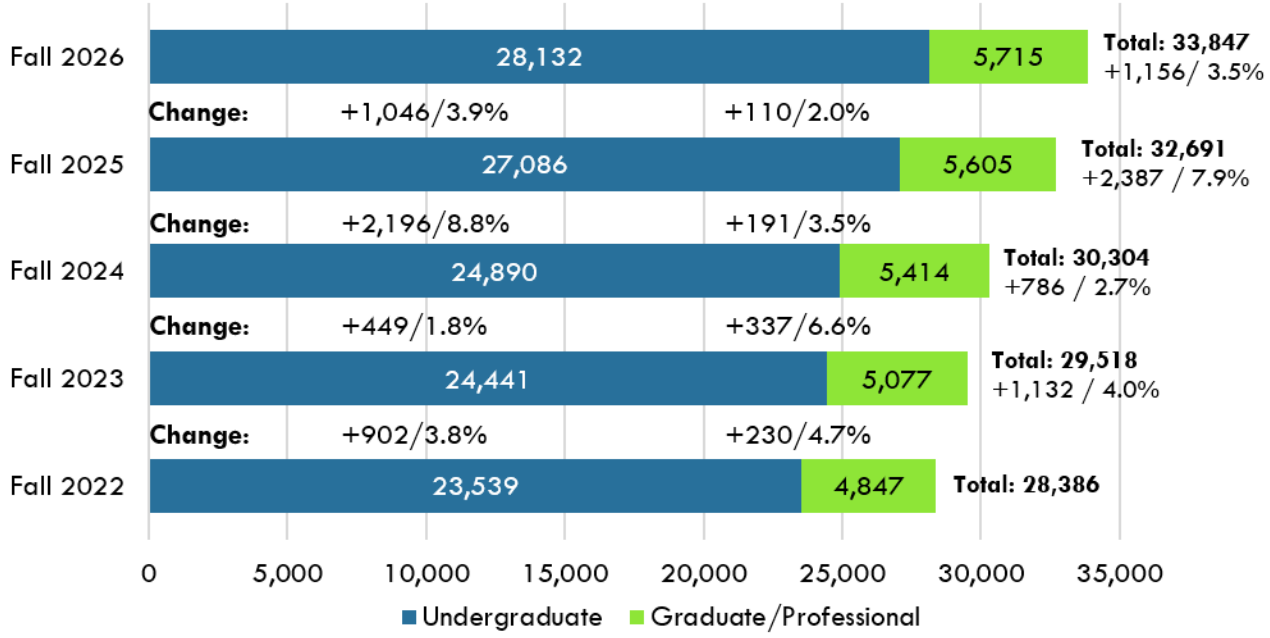

As shown in Table 7, nine of the 12 universities enrolled more African American undergraduates than in Fall 2025, led by SIUE (+25.4%, +474), SIUC (+20.7%, +299), UIC (+14.4%, +309), and NIU (+9.6%, +259). Undergraduate enrollment fell at WIU (-28.9%, -186), EIU (-7.5%, -66), and GSU (-4.4%, -46). At the graduate and professional level, ten universities grew, led by UIS (+18.2%, +50), WIU (+16.7%, +17), UIUC (+11.0%, +104), ISU (+9.3%, +20), and NEIU (+9.2%, +11). Total African American enrollment rose at nine universities, led by SIUE (+22.7%), SIUC (+14.2%), UIS (+11.8%), and UIC (+10.5%).

*Table 7. African American Enrollments and Year to Year (Headcount)*

| | Fall 2025-2026 | | | Fall 2026-2027 | | | Year-to-Year % Change | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Undergrad | Graduate | Total | Undergrad | Graduate | Total | Undergrad | Graduate | Total |
| CSU | 1,315 | 466 | **1,781** | 1,421 | 491 | **1,912** | 8.1% | 5.4% | **7.4%** |
| EIU | 878 | 93 | **971** | 812 | 99 | **911** | -7.5% | 6.5% | **-6.2%** |
| GSU | 1,040 | 568 | **1,608** | 994 | 601 | **1,595** | -4.4% | 5.8% | **-0.8%** |
| ISU | 2,844 | 214 | **3,058** | 2,870 | 234 | **3,104** | 0.9% | 9.3% | **1.5%** |
| NEIU | 600 | 119 | **719** | 652 | 130 | **782** | 8.7% | 9.2% | **8.8%** |
| NIU | 2,687 | 344 | **3,031** | 2,946 | 341 | **3,287** | 9.6% | -0.9% | **8.4%** |
| SIUC | 1,442 | 443 | **1,885** | 1,741 | 412 | **2,153** | 20.7% | -7.0% | **14.2%** |
| SIUE | 1,864 | 324 | **2,188** | 2,338 | 347 | **2,685** | 25.4% | 7.1% | **22.7%** |
| UIC | 2,141 | 1,289 | **3,430** | 2,450 | 1,340 | **3,790** | 14.4% | 4.0% | **10.5%** |
| UIS | 347 | 274 | **621** | 370 | 324 | **694** | 6.6% | 18.2% | **11.8%** |
| UIUC | 2,018 | 944 | **2,962** | 2,070 | 1,048 | **3,118** | 2.6% | 11.0% | **5.3%** |
| WIU | 644 | 102 | **746** | 458 | 119 | **577** | -28.9% | 16.7% | **-22.7%** |
| **Total** | **17,820** | **5,180** | **23,000** | **19,122** | **5,486** | **24,608** | **7.3%** | **5.9%** | **7.0%** |

**Enrollment of Latino Students.** As shown in Figure 3, Latino enrollment rose 3.5% (+1,156 students) to 33,847 in Fall 2026, the highest of the five fall terms shown, for undergraduates, for graduate and professional students, and in total. Undergraduate enrollment grew 3.9% (+1,046) to 28,132, and graduate and professional enrollment grew 2.0% (+110) to 5,715.

*Figure 3. Headcount Enrollment of Latino Students at Illinois Public Universities*



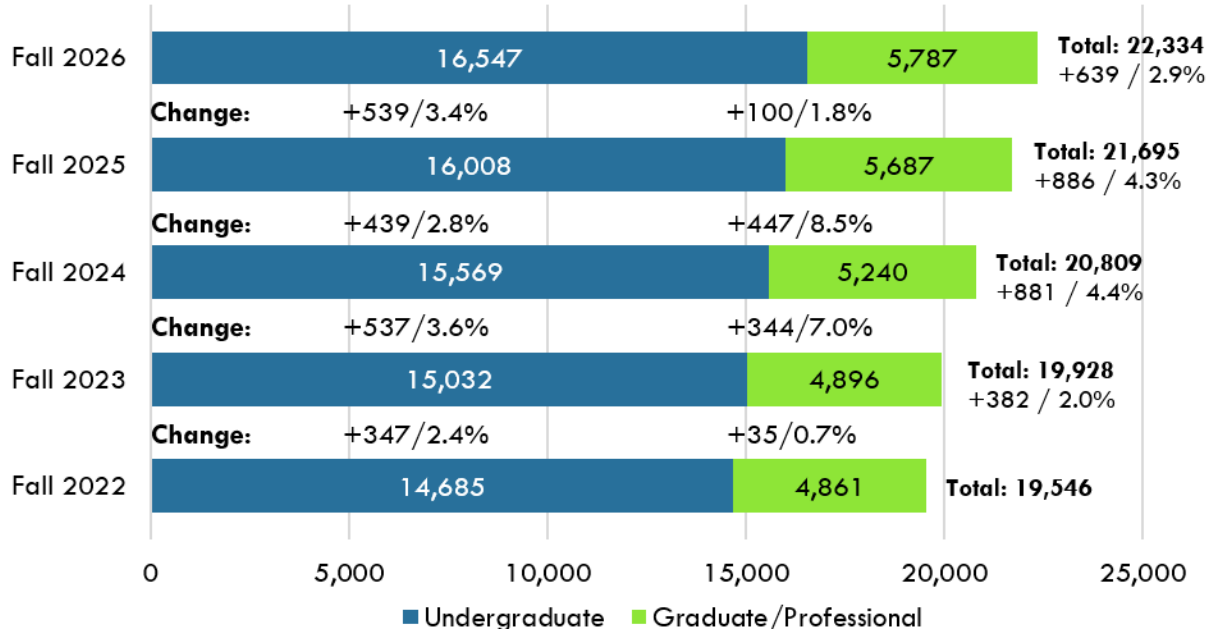

As shown in Table 8, nine of the 12 universities enrolled more Latino undergraduates than in Fall 2025. SIUE (+19.2%, +136) and UIS (+17.2%, +45) had the largest percentage gains, and UIC (+7.1%, +629), ISU (+6.9%, +201), UIUC (+3.2%, +182), and SIUC (+9.1%, +86) added the most students. Undergraduate enrollment fell at three universities: NEIU (-10.8%, -227), WIU (-6.4%, -30), and EIU (-1.2%, -15). At the graduate and professional level, seven universities grew, led by ISU (+10.5%), UIC (+7.7%), CSU (+7.6%), and SIUE (+7.2%); the largest declines were at NEIU (-21.5%, -118) and GSU (-9.4%, -21). Total Latino enrollment rose at eight universities, led by SIUE (+17.4%), UIS (+10.6%), SIUC (+8.2%), and UIC (+7.2%).

*Table 8. Latino Enrollments and Year to Year (Headcount)*

| | Fall 2025-2026 | | | Fall 2026-2027 | | | Year-to-Year % Change | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Undergrad | Graduate | Total | Undergrad | Graduate | Total | Undergrad | Graduate | Total |
| CSU | 187 | 66 | **253** | 188 | 71 | **259** | 0.5% | 7.6% | **2.4%** |
| EIU | 1,229 | 74 | **1,303** | 1,214 | 74 | **1,288** | -1.2% | 0.0% | **-1.2%** |
| GSU | 496 | 224 | **720** | 502 | 203 | **705** | 1.2% | -9.4% | **-2.1%** |
| ISU | 2,924 | 209 | **3,133** | 3,125 | 231 | **3,356** | 6.9% | 10.5% | **7.1%** |
| NEIU | 2,100 | 549 | **2,649** | 1,873 | 431 | **2,304** | -10.8% | -21.5% | **-13.0%** |
| NIU | 3,253 | 514 | **3,767** | 3,285 | 523 | **3,808** | 1.0% | 1.8% | **1.1%** |
| SIUC | 941 | 226 | **1,167** | 1,027 | 236 | **1,263** | 9.1% | 4.4% | **8.2%** |
| SIUE | 707 | 125 | **832** | 843 | 134 | **977** | 19.2% | 7.2% | **17.4%** |
| UIC | 8,844 | 1,777 | **10,621** | 9,473 | 1,913 | **11,386** | 7.1% | 7.7% | **7.2%** |
| UIS | 262 | 133 | **395** | 307 | 130 | **437** | 17.2% | -2.3% | **10.6%** |
| UIUC | 5,673 | 1,597 | **7,270** | 5,855 | 1,664 | **7,519** | 3.2% | 4.2% | **3.4%** |
| WIU | 470 | 111 | **581** | 440 | 105 | **545** | -6.4% | -5.4% | **-6.2%** |
| **Total** | **27,086** | **5,605** | **32,691** | **28,132** | **5,715** | **33,847** | **3.9%** | **2.0%** | **3.5%** |

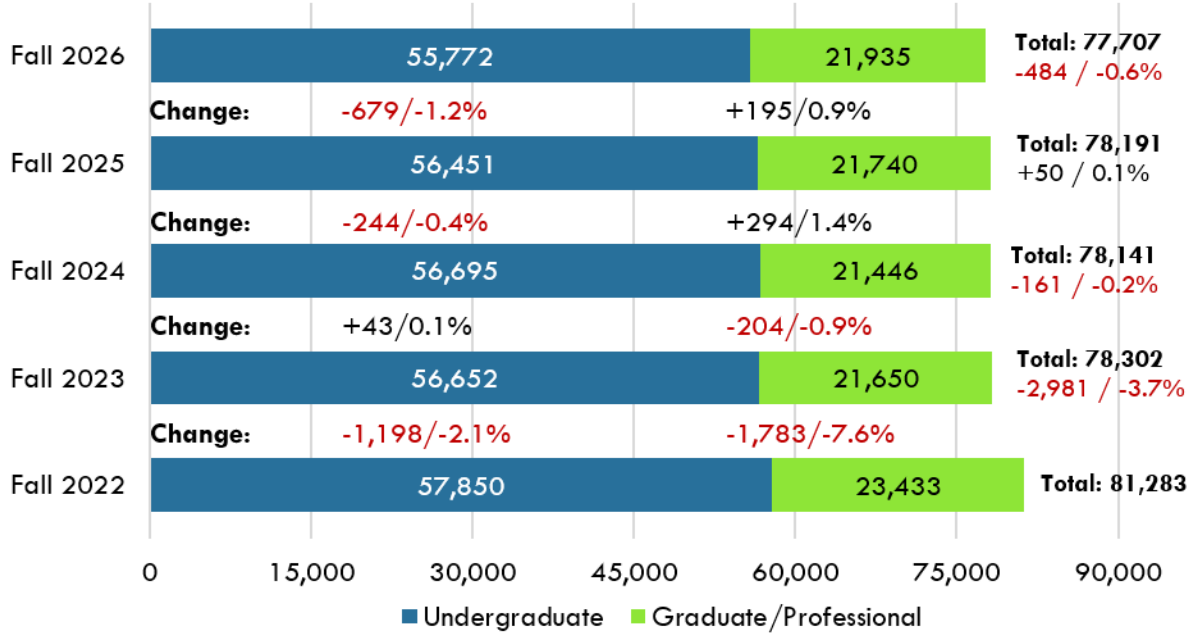
**Enrollment of Asian Students.** Total Asian enrollment rose 2.9% (+639 students) to 22,334 in Fall 2026. Asian undergraduate enrollment increased by 3.4% (+539 students) to 16,547, while graduate and professional enrollment grew 1.8% (+100 students) to 5,787. Statewide, Asian undergraduate enrollment remains heavily concentrated at UIUC (8,721) and UIC (5,091), which together enroll 83.5% of all Asian undergraduates at Illinois public universities. UIUC (+365, or +4.4%) and UIC (+206, or +4.2%) also accounted for most of the year-over-year undergraduate gains, while universities with small Asian undergraduate enrollments had the largest percentage declines: GSU (-26.9%), WIU (-16.7%), and EIU (-10.1%).

*Figure 4. Headcount Enrollment of Asian Students at Illinois Public Universities*




**Enrollment of White Students.** As shown in Figure 5, enrollment for White students fell 0.6% (-484 students) to 77,707 in Fall 2026. Undergraduate enrollment fell 1.2% (-679) to 55,772, while graduate and professional enrollment rose 0.9% (+195) to 21,935.

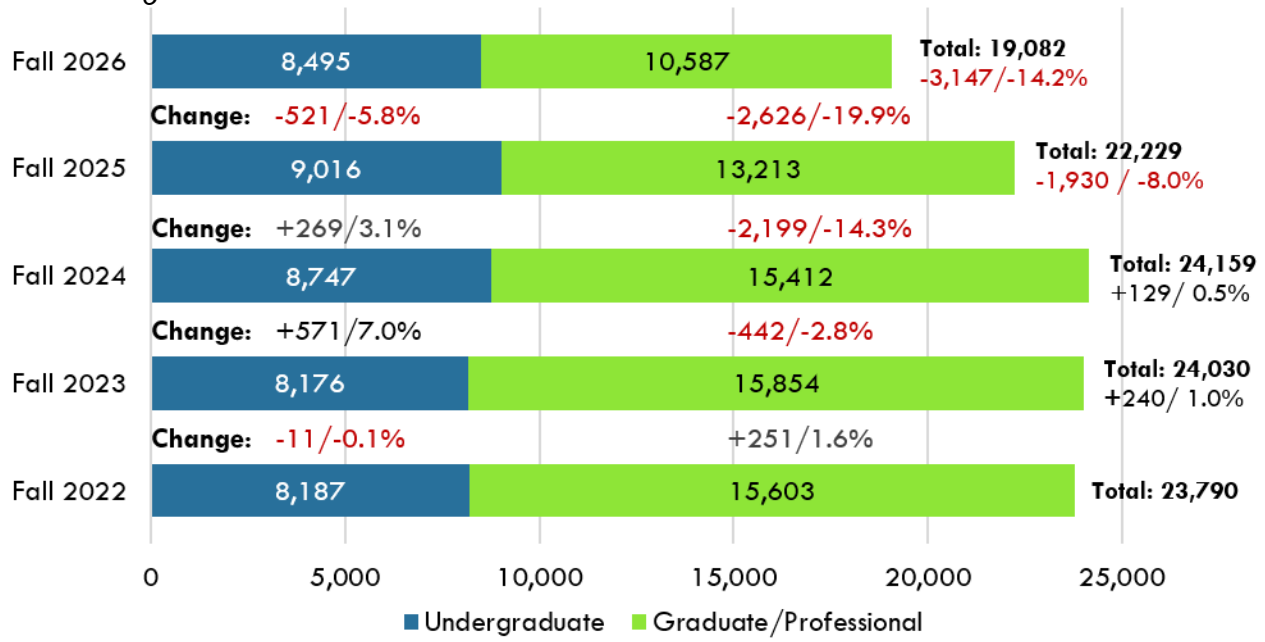
*Figure 5. Headcount Enrollment of White Students at Illinois Public Universities*




**Enrollment of International Students.** As shown in Figure 6, international enrollment fell 14.2% (-3,147 students) to 19,082 in Fall 2026. Undergraduate enrollment fell 5.8% (-521) to 8,495, and graduate and professional enrollment fell 19.9% (-2,626) to 10,587.

International enrollment fell at all 12 public universities. In headcount terms, the largest losses were at the two universities with the most international students, UIUC (-1,179) and UIC (-471). In percentage terms, the largest drops were at GSU (-59.9%), UIS (-52.3%), and EIU (-43.3%), mainly because of large declines in international graduate students. At the undergraduate level, results were mixed: NEIU (+16.9%), CSU (+14.8%), and SIUE (+0.4%) posted gains, whereas UIC (-7.8%) and UIUC (-5.3%) declined.

*Figure 6. Headcount Enrollment of International Students at Illinois Public Universities*



**Fall to Fall Retention by Race/Ethnicity.** As shown in Table 9, 82.6% of first-time, full-time freshmen who entered Illinois public universities in Fall 2025 returned to the same institution in Fall 2026, down 1.0 percentage point from 83.6% the prior year. Retention rates differed across racial and ethnic groups: Asian (92.8%), international (88.9%), White (87.1%), two or more races (85.5%), Latino (79.5%), American Indian/Alaska Native (71.1%), and African American (67.0%).

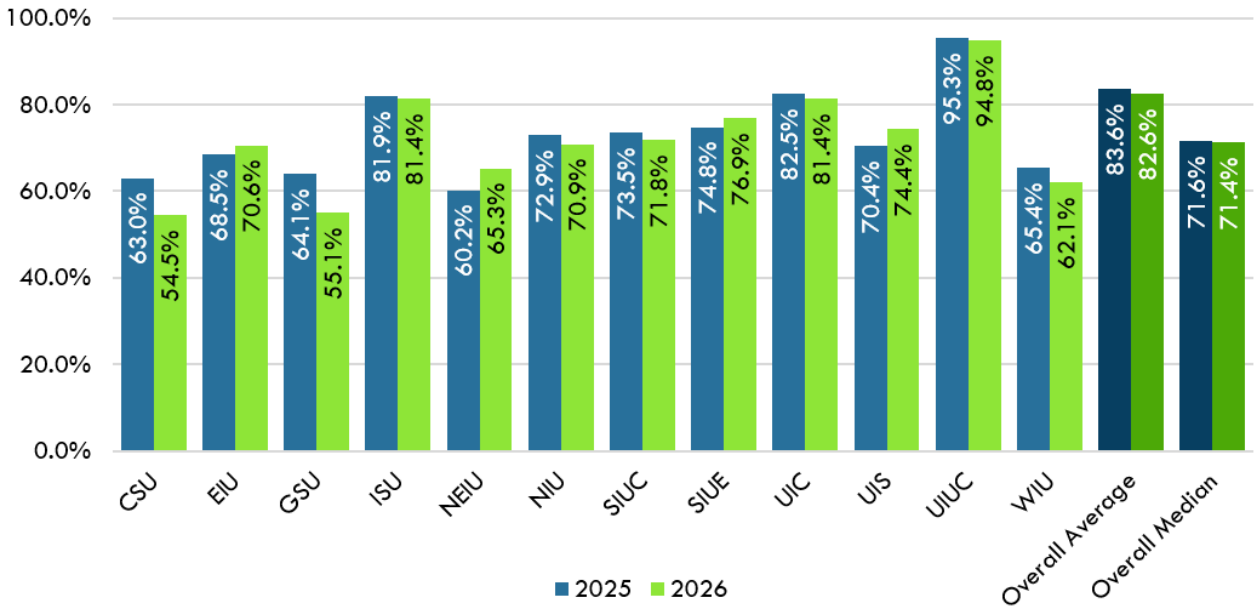
In 2026, retention declined slightly from the prior year for most groups, including African American (67.3% to 67.0%), Latino (80.6% to 79.5%), and White (88.4% to 87.1%) students. Over the four years from 2022 to 2026, however, overall retention has improved by 2.3 percentage points, including gains for African American (+5.0 percentage points) and Latino (+3.8 percentage points) freshmen. Over these four years, retention increased for every group in Table 9, including two or more races (+5.8 percentage points), White (+3.3), American Indian/Alaska Native (+3.2), Missing/Not Reported (+1.4), international students (+0.9), and Asian (+0.1). American Indian/Alaska Native students posted the largest single-year increase (+9.3 percentage points, from 61.8% to 71.1%), although this group is small, so year-to-year changes should be read with caution. Meanwhile, retention for students with Missing/Not Reported race/ethnicity fell 6.1 percentage points to 80.7%. International student retention rose 5.1 percentage points to 88.9%.

*Table 9. Fall to Fall Retention by Race / Ethnicity at Illinois Public Universities*

| Race/Ethnicity | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | Annual Change | 4-Year Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | 80.3% | 80.3% | 81.3% | 83.6% | 82.6% | -0.97% | 2.3% |
| African American | 62.0% | 59.2% | 61.8% | 67.3% | 67.0% | -0.35% | 5.0% |
| American Indian, Alaska Native | 67.9% | 62.5% | 78.3% | 61.8% | 71.1% | 9.31% | 3.2% |
| Asian | 92.7% | 91.9% | 93.3% | 92.9% | 92.8% | -0.12% | 0.1% |
| Latino | 75.7% | 75.3% | 75.7% | 80.6% | 79.5% | -1.13% | 3.8% |
| White | 83.8% | 86.5% | 87.2% | 88.4% | 87.1% | -1.30% | 3.3% |
| 2+ Races | 79.7% | 80.5% | 85.2% | 84.2% | 85.5% | 1.33% | 5.8% |
| International Students | 88.0% | 85.8% | 85.4% | 83.8% | 88.9% | 5.12% | 0.9% |
| Missing/Not Reported | 79.3% | 81.1% | 80.9% | 86.8% | 80.7% | -6.10% | 1.4% |

**Fall to Fall Retention by Institution.** Freshman retention rates varied considerably across the 12 public universities in Fall 2026 (Figure 7). UIUC maintained the highest retention rate at 94.8%, followed by UIC and ISU (81.4%). Four institutions improved their retention rates year-over-year, led by NEIU (+5.1 percentage points to 65.3%), UIS (+4.0 points to 74.4%), EIU (+2.1 points to 70.6%), and SIUE (+2.1 points to 76.9%). Conversely, the steepest declines occurred at GSU (-9.0 percentage points to 55.1%) and CSU (-8.5 points to 54.5%), both of which had large gains the prior year and have small freshman classes, where rates can change more from one year to the next.

*Figure 7. Fall to Fall Retention by Illinois Public University*




**Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender**

**Female students** continue to make up more than half of all students at Illinois public universities, accounting for 54.2% of total enrollment (103,111 students) in Fall 2026, compared with 45.3% for male students (86,210) and 0.4% (793) reported as another or unspecified gender. Year-over-year, enrollment of female students increased by 0.9%, while enrollment of male students decreased by 1.0%, widening the gender gap to 16,901 students.

**African American:** African American undergraduate enrollment increased by 7.3% at Illinois public universities, rising 6.1% for male students and 8.0% for female students (*see Table 10*). Enrollment of African American freshmen increased by 5.8% year-over-year, with growth of 8.0% among female freshmen and 2.4% among male freshmen. Enrollment of African American transfer students increased by 15.1%, with increases of 20.8% for female students and 6.8% for male students.

**Asian:** Undergraduate enrollment of Asian students at Illinois public universities increased by 3.4%. Enrollment of Asian female students increased by 2.4% and of Asian male students by 4.1%. Asian freshman enrollment increased by 11.0%, with female students at 11.7% and male students at 10.6%. Enrollment of new Asian transfer students decreased by 2.0%: down 5.1% for female students and up 1.2% for male students.

**Latino:** Undergraduate enrollment of Latino students increased by 3.9%, with female students at 4.4% and male students at 3.1%. Latino freshman enrollment decreased by 4.1% in 2026-27, after an increase in 2025-26 (female students -3.1%, male students -5.6%). Enrollment of new Latino transfer students increased by 2.4% (female students 6.6%, male students -3.2%).

**White:** Undergraduate enrollment of White students decreased by 1.2% (female students -0.2%, male students -2.5%). Freshmen enrollment of White students was nearly unchanged (0.1%; female students 0.1%, male students 0.0%). Enrollment of new White transfer students decreased by 1.5% (female students -1.4%, male students -1.7%).

**International:** International student enrollment decreased across all enrollment types, with an overall undergraduate decrease of 5.8% (female students -6.3%, male students -5.4%). International freshman

enrollment decreased by 7.0% (female students -10.6%, male students -4.7%). Enrollment of international new transfer students decreased by 15.1% (female students -13.1%, male students -16.2%).

**Graduate/Professional:** Graduate and professional enrollment grew for African American (5.9%; female students 5.2%, male students 6.2%), Latino (2.0%; 0.7%, 3.4%), Asian (1.8%; 2.8%, -0.2%), and White (0.9%; 0.3%, 1.3%) students. Enrollment of international graduate/professional students decreased by 19.9% in 2026-27 (female students -18.8%, male students -20.7%), after a decrease of 14.3% in 2025-26 (Figure 6).

*Table 10. Change in Headcounts by Gender and Race from 2025-26 to 2026-27*

| | | 2026 Undergraduate | 2026 New First-Time Full-Time UG | 2026 New Full-Time Transfer UG | 2026 Graduate/ Professional |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **African American** | Men | 6.1% | 2.4% | 6.8% | 6.2% |
| | Women | 8.0% | 8.0% | 20.8% | 5.2% |
| | **Total** | **7.3%** | **5.8%** | **15.1%** | **5.9%** |
| **Hispanic/Latino** | Men | 3.1% | -5.6% | -3.2% | 3.4% |
| | Women | 4.4% | -3.1% | 6.6% | 0.7% |
| | **Total** | **3.9%** | **-4.1%** | **2.4%** | **2.0%** |
| **Asian** | Men | 4.1% | 10.6% | 1.2% | -0.2% |
| | Women | 2.4% | 11.7% | -5.1% | 2.8% |
| | **Total** | **3.4%** | **11.0%** | **-2.0%** | **1.8%** |
| **White** | Men | -2.5% | 0.0% | -1.7% | 1.3% |
| | Women | -0.2% | 0.1% | -1.4% | 0.3% |
| | **Total** | **-1.2%** | **0.1%** | **-1.5%** | **0.9%** |
| **International (Nonresident)** | Men | -5.4% | -4.7% | -16.2% | -20.7% |
| | Women | -6.3% | -10.6% | -13.1% | -18.8% |
| | **Total** | **-5.8%** | **-7.0%** | **-15.1%** | **-19.9%** |

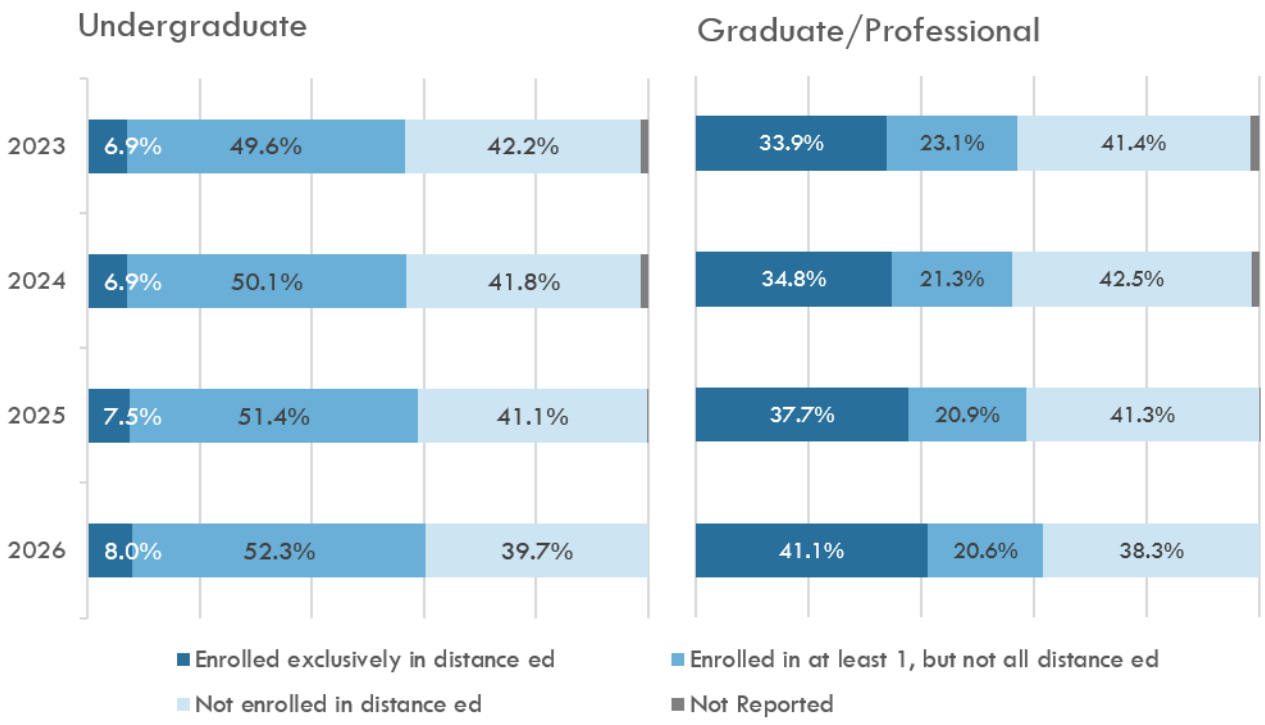
## Enrollment by Distance Education Status

**Distance Education. I**n Fall 2026, 32,901 students (17.3% of total enrollment) were enrolled exclusively in distance education courses, comprising 10,978 undergraduates (8.0% of all undergraduates) and 21,923 graduate/professional students (41.1% of all graduate/professional students). Year-over-year, exclusively online enrollment grew by 9.0% among undergraduates and 5.7% among graduate/professional students.

Most undergraduates combine online and in-person courses: 52.3% (71,538 students) enrolled in at least one, but not all, distance education courses (+3.3% from Fall 2025), while undergraduates taking exclusively in-person courses declined by 2.1% to 54,279. Among graduate and professional students, enrollment declined both for those taking some distance education courses (-4.4% to 10,998) and for those taking no distance education courses (-10.2% to 20,398).

Since distance education tracking began in Fall 2023, exclusively online enrollment has climbed steadily from 27,571 in Fall 2023 to 28,357 in Fall 2024, 30,810 in Fall 2025, and 32,901 in Fall 2026, a cumulative increase of 19.3%. In contrast, enrollment of students taking only in-person courses fell 4.4% over the past year. The share of students enrolled exclusively online varies widely by university: UIS (54.3%), GSU (46.8%), and NEIU (35.2%) enrolled the highest proportions of students exclusively online in Fall 2026, whereas ISU (6.5%), UIC (12.6%), and EIU (14.2%) enrolled the lowest.

*Figure 8. Enrollment by Distance Education Status at Illinois Public Universities (% of Headcount)*




## Conclusion

Enrollment at Illinois public universities grew modestly in Fall 2026 and reached its highest level in the nine fall terms this report covers (Fall 2018 to Fall 2026). Undergraduates accounted for the increase: both new and continuing enrollment grew for another year. Graduate and professional enrollment declined for a second year, mainly because international student enrollment decreased sharply.

These results support the goals of *A Thriving Illinois*. African American and Latino enrollment each reached a new high, which shows continued progress on access and equity. Transfer students remained a stable source of new undergraduates, and more students took all of their courses online than in the previous year. Undergraduate enrollment rose at most universities, both large and small. Western Illinois University was the exception, with declines in nearly every category.

Two trends need monitoring next year. First, graduate and professional enrollment has now declined for a second year, and most of the loss is among international students. Second, freshman retention decreased slightly. Retention had risen in the two previous years and was at its highest last year. The current rate is still above the rates of the earlier years. Overall, enrollment is stable, and the system continues to advance its equity goals.

## Appendix: Methodology

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) collects fall enrollment data through First Look, a standardized statewide process. All 12 public universities report enrollment as of the 10th day of the fall semester, known as the census date. Public Act 103-1020 requires First Look reporting. The 10-day census provides a consistent snapshot of enrollment that can be compared across institutions and years. Institutions report every student enrolled for credit, including undergraduate, graduate, dual credit, transfer, and non-degree students, whether they attend in person or online. Because First Look is an early, aggregate collection, all Fall 2026 figures in this report are preliminary. They may be revised when institutions submit final, student-level census records through the Illinois Higher Education Information System (IHEIS) in Spring 2027.

IBHE administers IHEIS as part of the Illinois Longitudinal Data System (ILDS). IHEIS is the core data collection for degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Each institution designates a Primary Administrator who manages its IHEIS account and submissions. Data are collected three times per year (fall, spring, and summer), and the fall submission is the official census used for annual reporting. Institutions submit student-level records that follow set data specifications, including race/ethnicity, residency, program, and unique identifiers, under the authority of Public Act 096-1249 and related statutes. IBHE staff validate and check these data for errors before final confirmation. IHEIS is designed to align with federal data standards (the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, IPEDS) and supports detailed breakdowns and longitudinal research on enrollment, completion, and student movement in Illinois public higher education.

Beginning with this year's report, figures for Fall 2022 through Fall 2025 are official IHEIS census data and Fall 2026 figures are preliminary First Look submissions. Each earlier First Look report published preliminary counts for its most recent fall, so prior-year totals in this report may differ slightly from the figures published in earlier editions. Institutions may also submit corrections after initial reporting, and a small number have done so for prior years. Prior-year figures in this report are the most current verified data available as of the publication date.

## Notes and Definitions

**Freshmen:** New first-time, full-time undergraduates. The term excludes new transfer students and part-time students.

**Continuing undergraduates:** Total undergraduate enrollment minus dual credit students, freshmen, new full-time transfer students, and new part-time students (first-time and transfer). Because this figure is calculated as a remainder, it includes any undergraduates not counted in the other categories.

**Fall-to-fall retention:** The percentage of a fall cohort of freshmen who are enrolled at the same institution the following fall. The 2026 rate is the percentage of the Fall 2025 freshman cohort still enrolled there in Fall 2026.

**International students:** Students who are not U.S. citizens and who are in the United States on a visa or other temporary basis. IPEDS calls this group "U.S. Nonresident" and counts them separately from the race and ethnicity categories.

**Dual credit students:** High school students who take courses at a public university and earn college credit for them. Dual credit is also called dual enrollment.